

Student food bank draws support

BY BRENT MUTIS

Morning Star Staff

With the holiday season in full swing, a group at Okanagan College is taking a bite out of the hackneyed notion of the starving student.

A joint effort between the Kalamalka Campus Student Association and Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) has netted hundreds of pounds of food and hundreds of dollars for the school's food bank. The effort supports students who are running a bit short of funds as the semester closes.

And more people are taking advantage of the service than at any time since the school's food bank was opened by faculty five years ago (It's now run by the students association).

"We've seen about an 80 per cent increase in access to the food bank (from last year)," said student association general manager Eric Reist. "Our shelves were getting bare so this made sense to us."

Reist said many people don't think of college students as being in need, but points out many of them don't have immediate family support nearby.

"A lot of students here live on their own, they're working two jobs and their student loans haven't come yet or have been exhausted."

The mountain of food piled up in the col-



BRENT MUTIS/MORNING STAR

Students In Free Enterprise members Mike Cestas (left), Rachel Barr, Victoria Wood and Graham Moir gather up the food items donated by Okanagan College students, staff and faculty.

lege's cafeteria is thanks to the dedication of some students who followed up an initiative started by Campbell's Soup called Let's Can Hunger.

Their project for SIFE involved meeting urgent and long-term hunger needs as well as raising hunger awareness.

It seems to have worked. A grand total of 3,542 food items were counted — far surpassing the goal of 3,000. In addition to the students' generosity, staff and faculty chipped in plenty

of food items as well.

The SIFE students were able to offer Okanagan College students incentives by dangling a Nintendo Wii and two laptop computers as prizes for donating food.

Each item given to the cause earned one raffle ticket and SIFE project co-manager Mike Cestas said the school's contributions have been exceptional.

"We were nervous about the response but we've been overwhelmed by it," he said.

"One morning we

came in and we couldn't set up the prizes there was so much food. We're happy but we've been stressed. We weren't prepared for this."

Adding to the stress is the fact that Cestas and his partners undertook this project at a time when final exams are creeping up. Reist has been impressed they've kept up to both tasks.

"It's pretty neat to see these kids take on this initiative," he said.

"We see it as important. It's a need we can meet so (hungry students) can focus on

school."